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Of these the Kubachins,[1] skilled armourers, the Kurins and 101
the Tabasserans—the two latter tribes probably descendants of Persian colonists—were the most peaceable, industrious and civilised, while the Avars were the most warlike. All the [622]
Daghestanli tribes were organised on a patriarchal and extremely democratic basis—the chiefs being elective and controlled by councils of elders. To quote Hanway—"as they live under a kind of republican government, the distinction paid to him (the chief) is not very considerable."[2]

Distinct, racially and politically, from the other mountain tribes were the Ossets, who, divided into four main tribes—Digurins, Tagaurs, Kutatins and Alaghirs—were settled over the southern slopes of the Central Caucasus and in the valley of the Upper Araghva. Their social organisation, with its divisions into classes of nobles and serfs, corresponded in many respects to that of the western tribes.

The mountaineers possessed the accepted characteristics of 181
all semi-civilised peoples: on the one hand reckless courage, extreme generosity, hospitality, loyalty, respect for the aged and love of animals; on the other hand a sensibility to offence and a childish vindictiveness which was expressed in perpetual and blood-thirsty vendettas, extreme personal vanity, a disinclination to submit to discipline or to undertake regular work, cruelty, callousness and violence.

All travellers unite in praising the hospitality of the moun- 574
taineers. "They fulfil the duties of hospitality with the most scrupulous attention, and both the host and his guest style one another *conacco*,[3] which is synonymous with *hospes* in Latin. On the departure of the latter, his host escorts him to another lodging, protects him, and, if necessary, risks his own life in defence of his guest. Though it has been observed that robbery is so general in this country that it may be considered as a regular profession, they nevertheless manifest the utmost fidelity to their conacci or guests.[4] Of the Ingushes Klaproth says, "At entertainments the host always waits upon his guests, and eats only what the latter throw him."[5]

The chief occupation and interest of the tribes lay in per- 721
petual raids against their neighbours, or against the inhabitants

[1] Chantre, basing himself on Kubachin legends, suggests that this community was of Greek origin, the descendants of a colony of armourers settled by the Persian Kings at Derbend (Chantre, iv, 228).
[2] Hanway, i. 373.
[3] The Italianised form of "kunakh."
[4] Klaproth, p. 336, Dubois de Montpereux, i, 88, both quoting Interiano.
[5] Klaproth, p. 349.